CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 4 March 1999, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Rodríguez Cedeño (Venezuela)

GE.99-60811 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 817th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

First of all, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, I wish to extend the warmest welcome to the new colleagues who are joining us - Ambassador Sipho Georges Nene, the representative of South Africa, and Ambassador Hubert de La Fortelle, the representative of France. You may count on our full support and cooperation, your Excellencies. We are sure that your great experience, both in the bilateral area as well as in international forums, will be a very valuable contribution to the work of our Conference.

I have two speakers on the list for today, the representatives of South Africa and Ukraine. The representative of South Africa, Ambassador Sipho Georges Nene, has the floor.

Mr. NENE (South Africa): Thank you for the kind words of welcome, Mr. President. It is a distinct pleasure for me to address the Conference on Disarmament for the first time. Having arrived here three days ago, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference and also to assure you of the continued support of my delegation in your efforts to finally resolve the outstanding issues on the programme of work for this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform the Conference of a decision taken by the South African Government, announced on 25 February 1999 by the Chairman of the South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee, the Hon. Minister Kader Asmal, that in accordance with the South African Government's policy on non-proliferation and arms control, that Committee decided that all redundant small arms in the possession of the South African Government be destroyed rather than sold on a tender basis as has been done previously.

Prior to this decision, more than 50 tons of firearms and 20 tons of ammunition that had been confiscated or deemed surplus had been destroyed by the South African Police Service since 1997. The decision to destroy all redundant small arms in future forms part of the South African Government's strategy to curtail the excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms. It is my Government's view that the magnitude of the small arms problem is of such a nature that it can only be addressed through appropriate national, regional and international action.

I have circulated with this statement a copy of the statement by the Hon. Minister Asmal and request that the text of the statement be circulated as an official document of the Conference.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of South Africa for his statement and the kind words he addressed to the Chair. The representative of Ukraine, Ambassador Maimeskul, has the floor.

Mr. MAIMESKUL (Ukraine): Mr. President, I have already had the opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament at a plenary meeting under your presidency. Let me again pledge the full support and cooperation of my delegation in your efforts to steer our multilateral forum to substantial negotiations this year.

(continued in French)

I would like to take this opportunity to wish a warm welcome to our new colleagues, the Ambassador of France, Mr. de La Fortelle, as well as Ambassador Nene from the Republic of South Africa.

(continued in English)

This first week of March is remarkable for solemn ceremonies and meetings commemorating the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. In fact, the Landmine Ban Treaty, with its 65 ratifications and 134 States signatories, has become a part of international law faster than any major treaty in history.

As head of the Ukrainian delegation, I am proud to inform the Conference on Disarmament that my country signed the Ottawa Convention on 24 February this year, thus becoming its 132nd State signatory.

The signing of this important international legal instrument by Ukraine represents proof of our country's devotion to the high ideals of peace and humanity, a concrete contribution to the strengthening of international security and disarmament. Ukraine has always supported and shared the aspirations of the international community to achieve a worldwide ban on anti-personnel landmines (APLs). In September 1995, the Government of Ukraine introduced a moratorium on the export of all types of APLs. We actively participated in the work of the First Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which elaborated in 1995-1996 amended Protocol II, the so-called partial ban on APLs. This year amended Protocol II was submitted for ratification by the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine. Thus Ukraine's joining the Ottawa Process is a logical step in the continuation of our policy on APLs, which was, in particular, confirmed by the destruction of over 100,000 landmines last May.

It is known that Ukraine was not among the first signatories to this Convention for some important reasons. First of all, this was due to the fact that the country has a large number of APLs in stockpiles which requires a lot of resources to begin their destruction and to complete the process, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, in four years. Accepting an obligation and being unable to fulfil it in time is against our major policy principles, our traditions and attitude towards international agreement.

In January 1999, a memorandum on mutually beneficial cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the Government of Canada on the destruction of APLs stockpiled in our country was signed, according to which the Government

(Mr. Maimeskul, Ukraine)

of Canada expressed its readiness to provide Ukraine with relevant financial, material and technical assistance. To this end, Ukraine would welcome any assistance from the States parties, in accordance with article 6 of the Convention, in destroying the stockpiled mines.

On behalf of my State, I wish to welcome again the achievements of the Ottawa Process in the successful entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction and the start of its implementation. We welcome the newly established international legally binding norm on an APLs ban as a pivotal step towards a sustainable response to the global humanitarian crisis caused by their indiscriminate use in various parts of the world.

At the same time I share the opinion that the CD has a role to play in resolving the APL problem, and my delegation fully supports the common position of 22 States, which was presented by our colleague the distinguished Ambassador of Bulgaria, Mr. Petko Draganov, at the last plenary meeting.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Ukraine for his statement. That brings us to the end of the list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? The representative of France, Ambassador de La Fortelle, has the floor.

Mr. de La FORTELLE (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, I simply wanted to thank you briefly for the warmth of your welcome and your very kind words concerning my South African colleague and myself. I am very touched. You were kind enough to say that we were experienced diplomats in multilateral and bilateral matters. I have indeed 32 years of experience in diplomacy, including several years at the International Atomic Energy Agency as a Governor, which I think will be useful to me in the coming years. I also wanted to say to you - and I can say this after having seen many French authorities in the past few weeks, before coming to Geneva - that my country views the Conference on Disarmament as a major body which has important tasks to accomplish, in the first place in the nuclear sphere, and France, as you know, seeks an effective start to negotiations on the substance of the cut-off, and therefore we hope that everyone will make an effort of imagination and goodwill, to break out of the present impasse. I think we will succeed, I hope, thanks to you in particular, the important work that you are doing In the nuclear sphere there is also a need to take a dynamic and forward-looking approach to maintaining the architecture of the Nuclear-Non-Proliferation Treaty, which is going to take up a substantial amount of our time this year and next year. But there are also other areas, and there too my country attaches great importance to the need to deal also with subjects which are quite indispensable, such as biological weapons, conventional disarmament, mines, which the Ambassador of Ukraine has just referred to, small arms, etc. So to move forward in all these areas, which my country considers very important, the keywords are realism, pragmatism, but also imagination and the resolve to strive together to move forward. With those few words, with great modesty because I have a lot to learn, I thank you once again for your welcome.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the Ambassador of France for his statement and his kind words addressed to me.

(continued in Spanish)

Does any other delegation wish to take the floor?

As I said at the end of our last plenary meeting, the Chair has been holding intensive consultations at several levels in order to bring us closer to a solution acceptable to all concerning the items in the programme of work on which agreement has regrettably not yet been reached. As you know, we have made every effort to secure agreement, especially, for the time being, on how to examine, how to deal with the subject of nuclear disarmament in the Conference. The first conclusion I can draw from these consultations is the desire on all sides to adopt our programme of work as soon as possible in order to make a start on substantive consideration of the items on our agenda. Secondly, I have been able to observe that it is possible to find some middle ground in order to arrive at an acceptable compromise. I hope to prepare a proposal on the basis of all these consultations, on the basis of the conversations we have had, and also bearing in mind, of course, the documents we have before us. Once I have prepared this proposal, I will circulate it among you in order to continue consultations and enable us to finally adopt our programme. It only remains for me to seek your support and of course maximum flexibility that will enable us to move forward and finally adopt our programme.

As I have no further speakers, no other comments, I inform you that our next plenary meeting will take place on Thursday 11 March 1999 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.